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## WAR CUSTOMS OF THE MENOMINI INDIANS

By ALANSON SKINNER

THE Menomini Indians recognized, roughly, five callings; prophecy, medicine, jugglery, sorcery, and war. Hunting, fishing, and agriculture were universal occupations, for, although such gifted persons as prophets, doctors, jugglers, and sorcerers were often able to eke out their existence through the fees which they extorted from their patients or clients, men of fame or ability great enough to gain them a living in this way alone were rare.

War was the one profession open to every one; all others required not only skill and training, but a certain acquaintance with the supernatural which was not vouchsafed to ordinary mortals. These miraculous gifts also played their part in warfare, but to a more limited extent. Any man could be a warrior, but, as a general thing, only those who received divine inspiration could be leaders.

Every man above the age of puberty was a potential warrior. From his earliest youth every male looked forward to the day when he could take his place among the fighting men, and devoted much of his spare time in acquiring dexterity in the use of weapons, and endurance on the warpath. The actual combats were never battles fought in the open between large bodies of soldiers; flying raids by small parties, ambuscades, and, particularly, night attacks, were the rule.

According to tradition the fundamental principles upon which their strategic tactics were founded, and the sacred palladiums which they relied upon for success, were derived from the Powers Above.

In that mythical early period in which all Menomini legends take their origin, the Sun and the Morning Star looked down upon their grandchildren, the children of men, and were filled with pity for their suffering, so they called a council to decide what could be done to bring about a better order of things. They sent for the

"Swift-flying-birds,"<sup>1</sup> the Buffalo, the Weasel, and the Pine Snake, all of whom came to the council out of pity for their neighbors, the children of men.

The "Swift-flying-birds" promised to endow the warriors with power to travel as fast as they can fly, and, if the braves were defeated, they were empowered to put on the birds' skins and escape by flying.

The Buffalo gave them his strength and courage, and the Weasel agreed to help the warriors stalk their foes even as he pursues his game. He said that they should be as successful in taking scalps as he is in capturing his prey.

The Pine Snake promised that they should have his ability to hide away in the undergrowth to spy upon the enemy, or to escape if they should be hard pressed.

When the animals had completed their donations, the Sun and the Morning Star gathered the presents into a bundle, sent for the Thunder-birds,<sup>2</sup> and gave it to them to transmit to the children of men. As soon as they had received the package, the Thunder-birds called an Indian up to their home in the western sky, and gave it to him with the promise that if he followed their directions he would always be successful in battle. The Thunder-birds further desired that he should present the bundle with tobacco, and pray to it from time to time. They promised him that whenever he did this they would hear his prayers.

They gave him a rare blue powder with which he was instructed to paint the faces of the injured warriors. He was assured that if he did this the blood would run from their wounds and they would recover. Then the Thunderers taught him the sacred songs that go with the medicines to make them efficacious, and permitted him to depart. Since that time worthy men have received the proprietary right to the war-bundle from the Thunderers.

In order to present a correct idea of the means employed in securing these charms, I shall give in full the story of a bundle which was formerly the property of a man named Watakona. This hero,

<sup>1</sup> The Hawks, the Swallows, and the Humming-birds.

<sup>2</sup> The Thunderers are imaginary birds who dwell in the western heavens. The flashing of their eyes is the lightning, and the sound of their voices is the thunder. They occupy a prominent place in Menomini tradition.

when young, was ambitious to receive recognition from the Powers Above. He painted his face with charcoal, and fasted, and prayed for their favor so often that at length all the manitus became aware of his devotion. Still he continued to call upon them.

Finally the Inämäkiwuk, or Thunderers, took pity on him and sent him word, through a dream, to build an elm-bark canoe and launch it in the ocean. He was instructed to take a straight course westward until he came to an island of rock projecting high above the surrounding waters. Here the vision told him he would find the Thunderers.

When Watakona awoke he was full of joy, for he knew at last his prayers were to be answered. He washed the charcoal from his face and broke his fast. Then he built the canoe in secret. When it was finished he carried it to the ocean, and set out as he had been instructed.

After he had travelled for a long time he came to the island. Here were gathered a great number of Thunder-birds, waiting for him. As soon as he had landed, the chief of the Thunderers, who was greater and handsomer than all the others, came forward and addressed him as follows:

"Nosé (grandchild), you have come to me according to my command, for I was troubled in heart when I saw you fasting and suffering, growing light in flesh and thin in body. Now you have gained great honor, for I have taken pity on you. I am going to give you the war-bundle to use upon the earth. You shall feed it, and give sacrifices to it for my sake, and in my behalf. You shall be empowered to use this thing at your desire. It shall protect you, and your children, and grandchildren, so that you and they shall live to a ripe old age. I command you to use it in the way in which I shall make clear to you, and if you obey me it shall obey you.

"Tobacco shall be the chief thing to please it, and when you give it tobacco you will please us, its masters. You shall take these things which I have here back to the earth again, and, when you reach your home, you shall make some others according to my instructions.

"Here is an egg; put that in the bundle. Here is a powder; put that in the bundle. These two articles shall enable you to set fire to the earth at your desire. Here is a little bow, and the image of an arrow, and a scabbard to carry. Here are all the birds of the air, that are after my

kind. They will assist you when trouble overtakes you. Take this red paint along, that you may apply it to your men who accompany you when you go to war. It will protect you, and the sight of it will please me. It will put new life into you and your men.

"Through my magical power I gave you the dream that called you here to see me. You shall be able to destroy the enemies that intend to kill you. You shall conquer, and victory shall always be yours. The enemies that you shall slay will be as food for me, and for the war-bundle.

"When you return you shall carve my image upon a board and place it in the bundle, in order to please me. You must take two plain square blocks, and upon each of these outline my figure in sacred red paint; one shall represent me as a Great Powered Bird, and one shall represent me as a man with a flint-lock gun in my hand. I am of dual nature. I can change myself into either a bird or a man at my will.

(And indeed the Thunder-bird-beings have been known to come to earth in human form. They have appeared as homely men, short and thick-set, with heavy muscles in their arms and legs, and bearing a bow and arrows in their hands. Ordinary persons can scarcely recognize them as Thunderers, but those who have received power from them in their dreams, know them at once for what they are.)

"I give you the power to know and see me in your night sleeps. You shall be forewarned of your enemies' plans. You shall know beforehand whether you shall win or lose your battles. You shall do all your fighting at night, and you shall destroy your enemies during their sweet sleep.

"Before you go out to war you shall first prepare and give feasts to the war-bundle. You shall sacrifice to it in behalf of the Thunder-birds. You shall receive that for which you ask us, for I shall assist you. Call on me through those sacred things which I have given you, and you shall have the thick fog settle down and hide you from the eyes of the enemy so that you may escape under its cover. You shall have the lightning and hail to cripple the wicked foe when he troubles you.

"You shall seek your enemy in the night through this bundle. You shall approach him with the stealth of the snake in pursuit of its prey, and encircle his village. Let each warrior carry the image of one of the medicine birds with him, with a single quill-feather fastened in his hair, and, as the humming-bird is so small in flight that none can hit it with a rifle ball, so will each warrior be. As it is impossible to strike the edge of a knife blade ground sharp and held off edgeways from the body, so shall you and your warriors be. These things I say to you that you may

understand the power of the medicines that I have placed in the war-bundle.

"You shall make incense of a portion of each of the sacred roots that I have included, and you shall purify yourselves with the fumes. You shall carry a little of each in your mouth, and you shall chew some of them and spray yourselves and your warriors with your saliva, that they may elude the keen vision of the enemy, for the eyesight of the enemy shall be destroyed when they approach.

"When you have drawn near and surrounded the village, you shall signal on the war whistle, and you and your warriors shall rush to the attack. You shall destroy the sleeping enemy with tomahawks and war-clubs that have been kept in the powerful medicines until they are saturated. Those who awake shall try to escape, but can not, for the medicines which I have given you shall sap their strength and benumb their minds. When a warrior takes a scalp he shall lick the fresh blood from it; this he must do as a sign that the enemy are devoured in behalf of us, the Thunderers.

"When the fighting is over, then you shall make a great ceremony with dancing, for the war-bundle, and for us, the Ināmikiwuk, or Thunderers. You shall thank us for the assistance which we have rendered you. Then you shall sing the songs for the scalps that have been taken with valor.

"Always respect the war-bundle which we have given you" (commanded the Thunder-bird-being). "Be careful to keep it tied up with a string, and keep it hung in a place by itself, outside of the house, away from the women, including the maidens who are just arrived at the threshold of womanhood. Especially keep it concealed from those women who are having their monthly courses. The bundle must never be opened for nothing, as that will be a serious offense to it, and to us, the Ināmikiwuk. It may only be opened in time of peril, or when you sacrifice to it in the spring or in the fall of the year, for our sake.

"And this is not yet all that I have to say" (said the chief of the Thunder-bird-beings to Watakona). "One thing that you must make when you get home, or which the women may make for you, is a pack-strap, *apékon*. This you shall make of *pésémékuk*, of coarse long beads. It shall be put in the bundle to be kept as a reward for the brave warrior who kills a chief or leader among the enemy. It shall be given to him as a great honor."

When he had heard these words, Watakona took the sacred gift and hastened back to impart his knowledge to his people.

As I have previously stated, during my residence among the Menomini, and since my return to the East, I have been so fortunate as to obtain three of these sacred bundles, and their rituals. In certain fundamental features these palladiums are alike. All of them contain the skins of the sacred birds of war, the "Swift-flying-birds," and snake and weasel skins. In two of the bundles buffalo tails were found, for according to some traditions the bison was among the animals who agreed to help mankind. Other invariable features are the reed whistles for signaling to the braves, deer-hoof rattles for accompanying the sacred songs, and the paint given by the Thunderers to cure the wounded.

The rest of the contents of the bundles varies in accordance with the instructions given in the dream of the owner. One may contain small medicine war-clubs, charms for the warriors to carry into battle; another a quill-worked bow, a scabbard, or some other valued trinket. Although tradition states that an embroidered pack-strap or its equivalent should be present, kept as a gift to that warrior who slays a chief of the enemy, none of these were found in the bundles which I have collected, but in two cases it was asserted that the straps had been given out to warriors who had earned them. The inner wrapping of the medicines should always be a white-tanned deer-skin, whence they get their popular name, *wapanak an*, or "white-mat." The external wrapping is usually a reed mat, but as a second choice a woven bag of Indian make will do.

The bundles are inherited by the children of the owner. If one should descend to a woman, she usually instructs her nearest male relative in its rites, but he can not use it unless he has been given permission by the Thunderers. A man who has the right to own the war-bundle may buy one from another man at a great price. Women are occasionally empowered by the Thunderers to possess the bundle, and tradition tells of several of these Amazons who were successful partisans.

The bi-annual sacrifices occur in the fall, and early in the spring when the voices of the Thunderers are first heard. A feast of meat is prepared—not a great deal, but enough for two or three mouthfuls—and this is placed in the little wooden bowls which usually accompany the bundle for this purpose. When the food is put into the bowls these songs are sung:

## I.

"Nina natom ināniu, aiowéyu oskatonanon  
Notowi katiné Awatuk."  
("I am the first brave man to kill you,  
I am truly the God.")

## II.

"Kisihakwa kawétomon  
Yom aké kawatomon."  
("All day I tell you.  
This earth I tell you.")

## III.

"Awano Ospamonayon."  
("In fog where I walk.")<sup>1</sup>

Then the persons who prepared the feast eat it themselves in behalf of the Thunderers, who derive the benefit of the food. At the conclusion of the feast, tobacco of two kinds, both plug and smoking, is given to the bundle with these words:

"N'hau! Nasākasaton ayum Wapanakian  
Misikta Ināmākiwuk kayaispakinokuwa, yos okihi."

Which may be translated: "Now I sacrifice tobacco to you, White mat, and to the great Thunder-birds that made this and gave it to man and this earth."

The tobacco is placed in the bundle, and it is consumed spiritually by the Thunderers, although in substance it remains unchanged. It is well to remove this old sacrificial tobacco from time to time, putting back some that is fresh. The old tobacco may either be used at the place where the bundle is stored, or it may be taken home by the owner and his friends and consumed at their leisure. It may be smoked in their pipes, or cast on a dish of coals, or on the fire. In the latter case, the sacrifice should be accompanied by the words:

"I give a general smoke to all the Mānitus, and it shall be consumed according to the way of the olden times."

<sup>1</sup> These songs are probably repeated many times over, but I am unable to state this with certainty, since they were transmitted to me by Mr Satterlee without comment. The meaning of some of the songs is obscure, and no doubt *intentionally* so, as they are mysterious and sacred.



In the old days, when one of the Menomini villages decided to declare a general war for any reason, runners were sent to the other divisions, or, in more ancient times, when the totems lived apart, to the territories of the various clans. Each messenger carried tobacco and a string of wampum, "as long as a man is high," painted red as a symbol that blood was to be shed. Wherever these tokens were delivered they were instantly recognized by the recipients as an invitation to war, and the people either refused them, or gathered at some designated spot.

General wars were infrequent, and were only called in extreme cases to retaliate for tribal injuries. Small war parties were organized to settle some old score, or to furnish excitement for the young men.

Sometimes the Sun would appear in a vision to a bundle owner, saying:

"I am going to feed you. You shall eat. (Literally, 'Take your war-bundle and attack such a tribe.') I shall feed you and this war-bundle. Go and eat up (destroy) the enemy."

Word was sent out among the young men, who gathered and set forth. The Mikäo, or leader, preceded the party with the war-bundle slung over his back. After they had gone forward for some distance they halted, and the Mikäo caused a long lodge of boughs to be built. He entered the structure, opened the bundle, and spread out its contents. Then a dog was slain and eaten. Some of its flesh was offered to the bundle with tobacco, and a war-song was sung in praise of the contents of the palladium. It was as follows:

"Anom awaya katiné äwätakatun  
Tatakésémakuton Ineko aioya  
Awatuk oskeisetuk. Tatakésémakatun."

("These things we use are truly of God power.  
Powerful are the things that we use.  
God said they shall be powerful.")

The war-dance was next enacted. It was a spirited spectacle. The warriors threw their bodies into dramatic postures, giving the war-cry and singing the war-song to the thumping of the tambourine

or small water-drum. With this dance went the following three songs, which were sung before the party proceeded:<sup>1</sup>

## I.

"Anéos nawataponéyun  
Aioanonéyun."

("Where I volunteer to fight  
As I am walking along.")

## II.

"Nésa yanisim  
Osowätokéyon."

("Savage I am.  
As God I am.")

## III.

"Wapano natäkgam."  
("Brave I am called.")

When the country of the tribe to be attacked was reached, scouts were sent out to report the whereabouts of the enemy. As soon as the villages of the foe were located, the war-party approached during the night according to the instructions of the Thunderers. Just before daybreak, at the hour when sleep is soundest and man's vitality is said to be at its lowest ebb, was the favorite time for the assault. When the marauders had drawn near, the Mikäo opened the bundle and sang this sacred war-song to the accompaniment of the deer-hoof rattles:

"Ninäné aiata potcnéu  
Äwätuk aiawéyon."

("I myself, I am surely,  
Over and over, God I am.")

This song stupefied the enemy and caused them to sleep more soundly. Then the leader distributed the sacred medicines among his warriors, according to the instructions given by the Thunderers, giving to one the skin of a bird or a weasel, to another a tiny carved

<sup>1</sup>For the second song the deer-hoof rattles are preferred to the drum. All three songs are probably repeated many times.



FIG. 51.—Menominee warrior bearing old style war-club and wearing an otter skin headdress with two eagle feathers, denoting two slain enemies.

war-club, or a feather, until each one had some charm. The men bound these on their heads or bodies and slipped out to surround the village. When the camp was encircled the Mikäo gave the signal and the warriors began the combat.

The fighting was done principally with bows and arrows, but men who had received promises of protection from the Thunderers often carried clubs alone (see fig. 51). Many wore arm-bands to which were attached metal jinglers called *nanihawnen*. The sound of these was thought to be efficacious to lull the slumbering enemy. There were songs for dealing the death blow.

While the members of the party were fighting the Mikäo stayed behind with the bundle, and he took no part in the fray. Indeed he was often unarmed. As fast as scalps were taken they were brought to him by the successful warriors, who received some present from the bundle as a reward. If a brave found and scalped the body of a man whom he had not killed, it was not considered such a feat as though he had slain the foe himself. He announced the fact and received praise, but no compensation.

The Menomini endeavored to take the entire scalp, including the skin over the forehead, but if there was not time enough for this, a small piece, including the place where the hair radiates from the crown, was sufficient. While the scalp was fresh the warrior licked the blood from it to symbolize the devouring of the enemy by the Sun.

When the fighting was over, the party returned. On the way back the warriors spent their leisure time stretching the scalps on hoops and drying them in the sun. The bundle contains a noxious medicine which was rubbed on the inner surface of the scalps, that if any one had been scalped and still lived he would die, no matter how far away he might be. As the party drew near their village, the people came out and met them with great rejoicing.

When they reached the place where the ceremonies were held on the outward journey, the scalp-dance was given to proclaim the miraculous power of the war-bundle. In the bough lodge the Mikäo announced the tidings of victory, reciting the brave deeds done, and the names of the heroes. Some of these men were entitled to change their names as an honorary distinction, and others were

given the right to wear the eagle feather on their heads. Only those who had killed an enemy were allowed such appropriate insignia of bravery, and the feathers of no other bird had any meaning except for ornament.

When this rite was over the men came forward to "dance their scalps," and there was then enacted the most spectacular of all Menomini ceremonies, the scalp-dance.

Seizing the scalp the warrior sang his victory song, relating the incidents of his achievement, as he reenacted the scene. Slowly at first he stamped about the circle to the beat of the drum, then faster and faster, twisting, turning, swaying, bending his half-naked body into a kaleidoscopic series of dramatic postures, his paint-daubed face ablaze with emotion, his song now and again interrupted by the spasmodic war-whoops that burst from his excited lips.

As he leaped about the lodge his hearers followed every motion with intensity, giving half conscious guttural ejaculations of surprise and approval. At last, when the warrior had worked himself almost into a frenzy, his sister or nearest female relative came forward and took the scalp from him, making him in return a present of fine cloth or other goods "to wash the blood from his hands."

The scalp now became the property of the woman, who ornamented it, and kept it forever, as a trophy of her brother's valor. If a man had no female relatives to "wash his hands," the scalp became the property of the bundle. These left over scalps were put inside the bundle and kept there until the following spring, when the bi-annual ceremony was held. All the war-bundle owners in the tribe repaired to a secluded spot where they offered tobacco and prayers to their patron deities. Then all the bundles were opened and a feast given, at the close of which the owner of each bundle called on several warriors of renown to dance for the unredeemed scalps.

Each man responded, and taking a scalp in his hand he danced to the rhythm of a great drum, recounting the circumstances of its capture. All the onlookers, even the women, joined in the dancing and singing. At length the sister of the warrior washed his hands with presents and took the scalp from him, so that in the end the trophies accrued to the women. This ceremony was thought to add greatly to the glory and strength of the war-bundles.

The annual ceremony is still held in the form of a feast, but "in these degenerate days" there is no attendant scalp-dance. Game is preferred for the feasting, but when it can not be obtained a dog serves the purpose. This modern ceremony, and the rite of feeding and giving tobacco to the bundles, is to please the Thunderers so that they will continue to sweep the earth with the winds and scour it with rain, that it may be clean and habitable for mankind (see fig. 52).



FIG. 52.—Interior of Medicine Lodge during a ceremony given to persuade the Thunderers to release one rain. The cross (X) marks several war-bundles suspended from the roof.

In conclusion it must be said that the Menomini never tortured their captives. On the contrary, prisoners were always kindly treated and were usually adopted. The tribe considered capture in war the height of misfortune, and to inflict torments on one so unlucky as to be taken prisoner was thought to be offensive to the "Overhead Beings."

The modern Menomini are losing their faith, and the knowledge of the old ways, but the belief in the efficacy of the war-bundle dies hard. As late as the Civil War the Menomini soldiers in the Wisconsin regiments carried these fetishes to the field with them, and one was used at Gettysburg.

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